

Going Dutch!

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The Self-regulating CSSD student in a Responsive Developed Curriculum

The title of this paper might sound a little bit unusual. What does splitting the bill has in common with CSSD workers or education? Isn't education best left to the professionals? What do you, dear reader, have to do with education?

Quite a lot, in fact! In this article I will show you how educators like me make decisions; not only based on theories, but also on expectations. We expect that everyone involved in the learning process - the student, the professor, the boss, the coworker - will play their part in making the CSSD a great place to learn. In other words, we all need to contribute and pay our share of this bill.

As a part of the educating team of Deltion College Zwolle (Netherlands), we are responsible for the state-sponsored education of the CSSD worker. Over the last year, we've made innovative steps making our course more flexible, accommodating the needs of both students and local hospitals. By implementing new methods, we have also better prepared our students for the modern demands of CSSD work. At the same time, we continue to integrate new insights from both the workplace and the field of education. This is what we call a responsively developed curriculum design.

A Responsive Curriculum Design

A responsive curriculum is a teaching plan that is attentive to change, rooted in values, and aware of the diversity among learners. It aims to be inclusive. At our school, we view differences in culture, prior knowledge, and personal interest as essential factors in shaping the learning process. Each learning experience is centered around the student, encouraging them to find meaning in what they learn. In Zwolle, educators describe responsiveness through three dimensions: being responsive to societal change, adapting to the variety of school settings, and embracing student diversity.^{1,2}

It is important to recognize that many of our students come from diverse backgrounds, as mentioned earlier. In fact, most of them still need learn how to 'learn'. This means our role goes beyond simply transmitting knowledge - the old "banking model" of education. Instead, it involves helping students develop the skills to manage their own learning process. In our program, students are encouraged to take ownership of their studies by setting personal goals, planning their approach, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their outcomes.

By learning how to learn, students gain strategies that help them adapt to new challenges, build resilience, and remain motivated even when the subject matter becomes complex or unfamiliar. These are essential skills not only for success in their current roles, but also for future career opportunities - alongside the mandatory courses required for a community college program in the Netherlands (such as Language, Mathematics, and Citizenship).

This approach to educating is grounded in Zimmerman's model of self-regulated learning.³ Students first prepare themselves through forethought: setting clear goals, planning their approach, and anticipating possible obstacles. In the performance phase, they actively apply strategies, monitor their own progress, and make adjustments when needed. Finally, during self-reflection, they evaluate what worked and what did not, carrying those insights forward into the new challenges.

The self-regulating learning approach also connects closely to the five career competences (or *loopbaancompetenties* in Dutch – a concept that doesn't fully translate to English).

As students learn to regulate their education, they reflect on who they are and what they value, they discover what motivates them, they explore new opportunities inside and outside the workplace, they make decisions that shape their personal development, and they learn how to build supportive networks. This is one of the core principles of our educational vision. Naturally, guiding CSSD students through this process requires significant time and attention.

To complete a module, students must engage in assignments aligned with the development goals they set for themselves. Teachers provide suggestions - such as creating videos, writing essays, giving presentations, or designing games - but students are also encouraged to propose their own assignments, as long as they meet their learning objectives. This practice reflects our vision, inspired by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan) and the self-regulation framework developed by Zimmerman.^{3,4}

Implementation

These design elements through which responsiveness is achieved include flexibility in pacing, variable grouping, choice of learning materials, and adaptability of the learning process. In the following paragraphs, I will expand on our ideas and share some practical tips and examples.

One of our first initiatives was creating a modular, online, learning system tailored to our students. We developed ten subjects spread over a two-year course, each directly connected to the core activities students perform in their workplace.

This design draws inspiration from Zimmerman's self-regulated learning model, particularly its three phases of forethought, performance, and reflection.

In addition to these profession-oriented subjects, we integrated a series of supportive, skill-building modules, which we call profession-based tasks. These focus on essential competencies, such as communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy. Within these lessons, we also take the time to address individual learning difficulties, always keeping the student and their learning process at the center.

At the core of these modules are competency-based interviews. In these sessions the students have the opportunity to defend their product choices, demonstrate technical insights from their workplace, and reflect on their personal development. They are also encouraged to discuss their future goals, ensuring that learning is not only about present performance but also about long-term growth.

Who will pay the bill?

For students to truly benefit from a modular, self-regulated learning program, it is essential that all their 'actors' are fully engaged in the process. In the praxis, we draw heavily from System Theory, commonly used in social work domain.⁵ We no longer focus solely on the student; we also consider the interactions they have within - and sometimes outside - the workplace, as well as the system of which they are a part (to a certain extent, of course). Learning does not happen in isolation; it

becomes meaningful when knowledge and skills can be directly applied to real tasks, challenges, and responsibilities on the job. When the workplace is fully engaged, students gain the opportunity to practice what they learn in authentic contexts, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

A workplace that supports this model reinforces the idea that students are learning not just for school, but for life and work. By encouraging students to set goals, reflect on progress, and take ownership of their development, employers help students strengthen the habits of self-regulated learning described by Zimmerman.¹ In my region, the best workplaces actively participate in this process. They know what subjects are taught at school on a week-to-week basis and complement our efforts as we complement theirs. Many even call monthly to ask about assignments and show genuine involvement and passion. This cycle becomes especially powerful when supervisors and colleagues provide feedback and space for reflection, allowing students to build confidence in mastering the unfamiliar tasks.

Coworkers also play a crucial role in helping students apply and internalize their learning. While supervisors provide guidance and feedback, it is often through day-to-day collaboration with colleagues that students experience the thrill of cleaning and disinfection, practice function controls, and learn how to navigate workplace dynamics. In the Netherlands, the role of CSSD worker is official labeled as “Techni-Medical Craftmanship” by the state and should be treated as such. It is a craft, and mastering it requires coworker to show you the subtle tricks of the trade. Engaged coworkers can act as mentors, sounding boards, or role models, sharing effective techniques and offering insights that go beyond formal instruction.

Having supportive peers encourages students to experiment with new approaches without fear of failure, reinforcing the self-regulated learning cycle of forethought, performance, and self-reflection. When coworkers are willing to share knowledge, provide constructive feedback, and celebrate progress, students gain confidence in mastering unfamiliar tasks and develop resilience in the face of challenges.

Result

As of this school year, student participation has significantly increased. Students are now able to take ownership of their learning and development, steering their own future within the CSSD. In a workplace characterized by constant innovation, we need a workforce capable of keeping pace with the high demands of the OR. Graduates must be able to maintain and enhance their skills independently, becoming proactive learners ready for the sometimes stressful environment of the workplace.

Our program also helps hospitals recruit more flexibly. Instead of having a single start date for the school year, we now offer five entry points, accommodating hospitals with varied schedules and backgrounds. While there have been some initial challenges, ongoing contact with the workplace provides reassurance that we are on the right track. We have the opportunity to visit hospitals once or twice a year (and vice versa), which allows us to receive crucial feedback that informs us of further improvements to our curriculum.

This responsiveness ensures that graduates are not only technically proficient but also capable of critical thinking and self-directed growth throughout their careers. By providing multiple entry points, we support a more inclusive and equitable learning community, giving all students the chance to participate and develop at their own pace.

Conclusion

Each year, new students enter our classes while others graduate, creating a dynamic environment where CSSD knowledge flows continuously from student to student within the college. We produce lasting content in the form of podcasts, videos, and other learning materials. Our classrooms are adorned with posters about bacteria and container labels contributed by former alumni, reflecting the cumulative knowledge of our students.

Maintaining a dialogue with both the workplace and our students is essential to keeping the curriculum responsive. Staying connected allows us to adapt and improve, ensuring that learning remains relevant and practical.

Finally, it is worth noting that much of the content we create is freely available online through an open-source network. Although the materials are in Dutch, we believe that valuable information should be accessible to anyone who wishes to use it.

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